

The Medieval Church Begins

590-800

Review

Jesus has been crucified and raised and given his commission to go preach the gospel and plant churches.

(slide of the spread of Christianity)

The disciples he left behind and many thousands after them have done just that. The gospel has gone from Israel to the east in Iraq and Iran and India and all the way to the west in Spain, and to the south in Egypt and North Africa.

The church has begun to take shape and the leadership is getting organized. You have individual pastor's and then we have bishops, who are overseeing many churches in a given location. We have three central locations of Christendom. Rome, Constantinople (modern Istanbul in Turkey) and Alexandria in Egypt.

We've seen the local and widespread persecution of the church and how it was used to fuel the fire of evangelism and the resolve of the church. We also saw the tension in the early church of what to do with those who were members of the church who had escaped persecution by giving into the worship of other gods. The church faced difficult questions of what to do with them and whether or not to allow them back into the church and if so, what that looked like.

(title slide)

We've looked at a number of important figures in church history, from Ignatius to Polycarp to Origen and Tertullian, to Ambrose and Athanasius and Jerome.

We also looked at the heresy of Gnosticism and it's danger to the church and how it tried to change the truth of the gospel.

If in the first week the danger to the church was from the outside, persecutions and outside heresies, last week Billy talked us through the maybe even greater danger to the church, that is the heresies that were coming from inside the church. The Church needed to be clear on her theology and what the truth was, namely in the person of Jesus. Who was he and who wasn't he.

Billy talked about this man named **Arius** who was a very influential teacher of his day who taught that Jesus was not God, he was sort of divine but not really and that he was a created being. "There was a time when he was not."

Billy also mentioned that so many of these heresies get recirculated in various forms throughout history. Today, the doctrine of Jesus in the **Jehovah's Witnesses** is essentially old school Arianism. What the Jehovah's Witnesses today will tell you about Jesus is what Arius taught in the 300's and was condemned as a heretic.

We've talked about two important church councils, the **Council of Nicaea in 325** and the **Council of Chalcedon in 451**, both largely dealing with the **Trinity and the person of Jesus**. These councils were fighting against heresy's that were creeping into the church and the councils were there to defend the orthodox, biblical view of Jesus.

Chalcedonian Box – Fully God, Fully Human, One Person, Two Natures. Don't think outside the box on this one!

Billy also began the discussion of how the church and state were starting to meld together. Whereas for the first 250 years or so of the churches existence it was the outsider, persecuted and purified by the trials. But beginning with Constantine and the Edict of Milan, which gave religious freedom to the Roman Empire, the church went from the outsider to the insider, the favored religion of the Empire. And now the Emperor had a say in what happened in the church. And as Billy so rightly said last week, under persecution it was pretty easy to know who was a true follower of Jesus and who wasn't, now it was getting more difficult. In the 300's people found the church a convenient place to be associated. There were business relationships to foster and money

to be made. And the lines of who was a true believer and who wasn't were getting fuzzy. We don't have any of those problems today do we?

(map slide)

I said a moment ago that by the 300's Christianity has spread as far west as Spain. It was in the 400's or so that Christianity begins to spread into England, Ireland and Scotland. For us living in America today, Christianity coming to this part of the world is a big deal.

I. The Churches Faithfulness to Missions

St. Patrick – (slide) As many of you know St. Patrick was actually born in England in about the middle 400's. At the age of 16 he was captured by Irish pirates and taken as a slave to Ireland. After about six years in captivity he escapes and returns to England and has a conversion experience to Christianity. After he joins the ministry he remembers those in Ireland and returns as a missionary. He is credited with bringing the gospel to Ireland and of course he continues to be a major figure in Irish history and ours, St. Patrick's Day every March 17th. He is known to have spoken out against slavery and under his ministry slavery in Ireland came to a halt. The men who came after him would bring the gospel to Scotland and other parts of England.

Brendan (slide) was born in A.D. 484 in Tralee, Ireland, and is best known as Brendan the Navigator for his sea travels. We know he went to Scotland, England and to Brittany, on the north coast of France preaching the gospel and establishing monasteries.

Columba (slide) was an Irishmen who lived in the middle of the 500's and is best known for taking the gospel to Scotland.

Aidan (my son slide) (real Aidan slide) was a monk who came from Ireland and went to the Northeast coast of England and evangelized the people there and won them to Christ. Tradition tells us that as he was marching with his men across Ireland to England they had memorized the Psalms and would quote them in unison as they walked.

(Do at least three of these names sound familiar....?)

We'll talk more about Pope Gregory in a minute, but at this point we only need to point out that he is the one who sends **Augustine (slide)** (not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo who lived some 150 years earlier that Billy talked about last week) and **40 monks to England as missionaries.** This Augustine becomes the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

And so Christianity comes to the British Isle's and will have a huge impact on the history of those islands to follow.

Boniface would take the gospel to the Germanic Tribes in the middle of Europe in the 700's and would eventually be martyred for the faith. Because of Boniface, Germany was a stronghold of the Roman Church up to the time of the Reformation.

"Few, if any, Christian missionaries have more accurately presented by their conduct the ideals of the faith they have sought to propagate. Humble, in spite of the temptations which came with high ecclesiastical position; above the breath of scandal; a man of prayer and self-reliance; courageous, self-sacrificing; and with a passion for righteousness – Boniface was one of the outstanding exemplars of the Christian life."

Kenneth Scott Latourette

I point out these guys because they would have an impact on England, which would have an impact eventually on America. Our heritage.

(title slide)

The first two weeks we covered the dates of 5 B.C. to A.D. 590 or what we refer to as **Ancient Church History.**

Today and for the next several weeks we will cover the next section of church history, the years from A.D. 590 to 1517, what we refer to as Medieval Church History.

Today, 590 to 800, The Beginning of the Medieval Church

II. The Rise of the Bishop of Rome

We pick up our story of Church History in A.D. 590. in the city of Rome.
(slide of Rome)

Over the past several years floods and war had ravaged the city and now the plague was in full effect. Carts were piled high with bodies and people went through the city collecting the dead. A once bustling city had become a morgue.

The first night we talked about the importance of the bishops and how they were godly men who oversaw (*episcopas* – overseer) a collection of churches. From about the 200's we start to see that whoever was the bishop of Rome, was seen to be the most *senior* bishop if you will. The first among equals.

Remember that the Roman Empire had been divided into two sections in order to better administrate the vast empire. The capital in the West was **Rome** and the Capital in the East was **Constantinople**. The eastern section of the empire would be known as the **Byzantine Empire**. As you may remember the western empire would fall in the 5th Century but the Eastern, Byzantine Empire of Rome would continue until they fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

(map of east and west)

How does all this play into church history? In the East, as far as the church is concerned, you have four major cities of influence, Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, Jerusalem, and then Constantinople. In each of these cities you had bishop or a "Patriarch" as they came to be known and each was a powerful influence in the church in the East.

In the west, you have only Rome. So, the bishop of Rome had no rivals if you will and he over time came to be seen as the leader of the church, especially the western church.

It's not hard to see how the bishop of Rome came to be called "Pope". The Father of all the Father's. The Bishop above all the other Bishops.

In fact in time, Rome came to have what has been called "**appellate jurisdiction**". That is the right to adjudicate disputes among other

bishops. So Rome was not only the teacher of the church but now the judge as well. That would have far reaching unintended consequences for centuries and to this day.

Let's talk about the most famous bishop of Rome to this point, or the person who is often referred to as the First Pope.

"The consecration of Gregory I as the bishop of Rome constitutes a watershed that divides the ancient period of church history from the medieval period." Earl Cairns

III. Pope Gregory I

Gregory was born about 540 into a wealthy family in Rome and was educated for service in the government. As I said at the beginning this was a turbulent time in the Rome and in the empire.

When Gregory was 33 years old, the Emperor Justinian appointed him Prefect or Mayor of Rome, the highest civil position in the city. Gregory was responsible for the whole economy of Rome, including the food supplies, the welfare program to the poor and even the construction of all new buildings.

Apparently this was not Gregory's first choice. He preferred the life of a monk to that of public service. A few years after being appointed the Mayor of Rome, he stepped down and headed for the monastery. After his father died he used all the money to start seven new monasteries and turned his father's palace into another monastery.

Gregory would fully embrace the life of asceticism, that is denying all worldly pleasures. He would never marry, he ate only raw fruit and vegetables, he would pray most of the night, and wore a rough shirt made of hair. He was a frail man to begin with and this lifestyle most certainly took its toll on him. At one point he would write to a friend, "I have been unable to rise from my bed for a long time. I am tormented by the pains of gout; a kind of fire seems to pervade my whole body: to live

is pain; and I look forward to death as the only remedy. I am dying daily, but never die.”

Yet interestingly, he would look back on these years in the monastery as the happiest in his life.

In 590, the current bishop of Rome, Pelagius II, died of the plague. That left the church scrambling for a replacement. The leaders talked and looked and finally after six months they settled on a monk named Gregory. They came and told him they had made a decision, he was to be the next bishop or Pope of Rome and Gregory’s response was to, run. He didn’t want the job and so he ran to the forest and probably would have stayed there if a group of people didn’t come find him and drag him back to Rome. He was a reluctant Pope to say the least. Often today, when we think of ancient Popes, we think of the abuse of power. Gregory was not that at all. In all we can know of him he seemed to be sincere, devout, albeit as we’ll see, misguided follower of Christ.

He wrote a book called **Pastoral Rule** which became sort of the Pastor’s Handbook for the next hundred’s of years on how to do ministry. He referred to himself as the servant of all the servants of God. Stressed the necessity to do good for the poor and for pastor’s to shepherd their flock and still keep watch over their own soul too.

About this time and important thing happened. The Lombard’s came on the warpath. The Lombard’s were a Germanic tribe to the north of Italy and when they came into Italy they destroyed everything in their path. Crops, churches, monasteries, castles, everything.

You need to know that by this time, the church in Rome was the largest and richest land-owner in all of Italy. They had a vested interest in fighting the Lombard’s and that’s exactly what Gregory did. He put together an army and finally arranged a peace deal with the Lombard’s. After this, the Lombard’s dealt with the Pope, not the Emperor. A huge shift had begun.

Now it was the Church who was installing military leaders, brokering peace deals and collecting the taxes and feeding the people. The Pope

was no longer just a Christian leader; he was an important political leader. That wouldn't change for next thousand years!

A couple more things about Gregory.

Remember too who he was. He had been a monk, living that ascetic lifestyle for many years before he came to be the most powerful leader in the Christian church. He established many monasteries for men and convents for ladies whom we would come to know as nuns.

Ever heard of a **Gregorian Chant**? He is credited with making this popular even though the Gregorian Chant wouldn't hit its zenith until the 9th and 10th centuries.

Gregory is put in the same category as Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome as the "Latin Church Father's" of the early church.

After his death he would be venerated as "Pope Gregory the Great."

Let's talk for a minute about the theological distinctives that were solidified into the church under Gregory's leadership. These didn't start with him but were solidified as part of the church while he was Pope.

IV. False Practices Incorporated Into the Church

Partly because he was so revered and played such an important part in the history of the world at the time, both inside and outside the church, his views of theology and church practice carried a lot of weight.

Baptism (pic of baptism)

Was also now seen as an act of forgiveness where the person's sins were washed away. For sins after baptism, the person would need to make atonement for their sins by **penance**, which is simply a form of self-punishment by the man or woman themselves instead of by God. Penance could be giving money, saying prayers, or some kind of physical suffering. The worse the sin the worse the self-punishment.

Whether or not you had done enough penance couldn't be known until you died.

(Infused Righteousness vs. Imputed Righteousness slide)

The idea of **infused righteousness** was not totally worked out yet but it's coming. In later weeks we'll talk about the major difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church and the issue of Infused Righteousness (RCC) and **Imputed righteousness** (PC).

Help from the Saints. (slide of Saints = St. Julia, St. Benedict)

The idea of praying to the saints, mostly those who had been martyred for the Faith was not new to Gregory, but he certainly solidified it. The idea was that these saints, the godly men and women who had died for the faith had special pull with God in heaven and it didn't heard, so it was thought to reach out to them to put in a good word for you. Certainly they had the ear of Jesus if anyone did.

"Our holy martyrs are ready to be your advocates; they desire to be asked, indeed if I may say so, they entreat that they may be entreated. Seek them as helpers of your prayer; turn to them that they may protect you in your guilt."

Holy Relics. (Pic of skull of St. Yves – patron saint of lawyers and abandoned children – quite the combination)

Another aspect of church life made popular by Gregory was the notion that the remains of one of these saints, were somehow spiritually powerful. Locks of hair, finger nails, pieces of their clothing, their bones of course were all things to be venerated and could help you in your spiritual defense against sin. It wouldn't be long before every Cathedral and church had to have the body of someone to claim as their relic, their saint. At least a piece of someone.

Purgatory. (pic of purgatory)

Remember that last week we talked about the tension in the early church in the 200's and what to do with those people who had caved in and pledged allegiance to Caesar instead of staying faithful to Jesus? Some said don't let them back in at all. Some, very few, thought they should be fully forgiven and let back into the church. Most took a middle ground. That is they thought they should be let back into the church but needed to do some penance to prove they were sincere and pay for their sins. Many also came to think that it wasn't fair that they should go right to heaven. So, this idea of a middle ground between heaven and hell was thought up. It was called, purgatory. Those people who had said, "Caesar is Lord" would go to purgatory for some undisclosed period of time and there they would pay for what they did, and eventually get to heaven.

This idea of a middle ground or purgatory came fully into play in the time of Pope Gregory. Purgatory was a place of suffering and purification for sins, not for those who die with serious sins, they go to hell, but for those who were not yet altogether righteous. At death, those who were holy went straight to heaven. Those who were terribly wicked and outside the church went straight to hell. Most everybody else who was in the church was in between and so went to Purgatory for some period of time.

The element of the church that took on the most importance though was the **Eucharist**, (slide of Eucharist) or as we know it, the taking of communion. Pope Gregory believed that the body and blood of Christ are really present in the bread and wine. I'm not sure that they had fleshed out the doctrine of **Transubstantiation** just yet, but you can see that it was headed that way.

For Gregory and the church at this time, the priest would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people who were present in the service at the time. Christ's death on the cross was a sacrifice for everybody. This was a special sacrifice for those present and it was effectual in taking care of some of your sins. Taking the Eucharist sort of counted as a kind of penance. It credited you with some merit and so the more you took the Eucharist the less time you would spend in purgatory.

Eucharist for the dead. The one little nuance that also came into being under Gregory was that you could offer the Eucharist for those in Purgatory to lessen their time.

(False practices slide)

So, you ask when did the Roman Catholic Church start? Again, while it wouldn't be called the *Roman Catholic Church* until the 1500's, it's sure taking shape now here in the 600's.

- Salvation comes from Christ and your merit.
- Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
- Praying to the Saints.
- Relics – at this point the remains of the saints but it would blossom into all kinds of relics, from pieces of the cross to holy places.
- Purgatory
- Eucharist being not just symbolic of the body and blood of Christ, but becoming the body and blood and being a real sacrifice for the sins of those present.

These are still, in some form or fashion cardinal doctrines in the Church of Rome today.

V. The Rise of Islam and The Battle of Tours in 732

Before we talk about this important battle, we need to set the stage for just a moment while we are here.

If it wasn't for a man named Charles Martel (the Hammer) Europe might today all be speaking Arabic and kneeling toward Mecca five times a day. The rise of Islam is truly one of the most incredible movements in world history.

In the year 570 in the Arabian city of Mecca, a little boy was born and his parents named him **Muhammad**. You may have heard of him.
(slide of Muhammad)

In 622 the followers of Muhammad were a persecuted band of visionaries huddled up in Mecca. One hundred years later, they controlled not only Arabia, but virtually all of North Africa, Palestine, Persia, parts of India and Spain and were threatening France in the West and Constantinople in the East. Incredible. When Scott talks about the Crusades in a couple of weeks he's talk more about this.

Think about it. Those lands and many others are still in Muslim hands today 1400 years later! And still growing!

(slide of Charles Martel)

Charles Martel was a Frankish King, that is a king of a Germanic tribe that had become the superpower in Europe at the time. He is also known as Charles "The Hammer" Martel.

He was sympathetic to Christianity and saw that he could use the church to further his own cause.

(slide of Battle of Tours)

It was in 732 that **Charles Martel met the Muslim armies in what is today north-central France, at the Battle of Tours.**

We're not sure how many men were involved on either side but we do know that armies of Charles Martel had horses, and it's likely that the use of a cavalry helped win the day.

Victory pushed the Muslim armies back into Spain, ending the Muslim advance into Europe.

Historian Victor Davis Hanson said of the Battle of Tours, "It was a landmark battle that marked the high tide of the Muslim advance into Europe." Leopold von Ranke felt that "Tours was the turning point of one of the most important epochs in the history of the world."

Like I said a moment ago, if it wasn't for a man named Charles Martel (the Hammer) Europe might today all be speaking Arabic and kneeling toward Mecca five times a day.

It's interesting to see what's happening in Europe today isn't it? It's been said that if the Muslim's couldn't conquer Europe by force, they are doing it today by birth. We might add now by immigration. By extremely high birth rates and by immigration they are changing the face of Europe. Just this year London elected its first Muslim Mayor.

The average Muslim woman has 3.1 children vs. the average of 1.5 children for non-Muslim European women. Do the math.

Globally the Muslim population is growing at the same rate, about twice as fast as the rest of the world. It is estimated that by 2100, there will be more Muslims in the world than Christians. Life is going to get interesting.

Okay, back to the mid 700's.

VI. Charlemagne (742-814)

Charles Martel would have a son named Pepin; Pepin would have a son named Charles who we will know as **Charlemagne**. He's an important figure and so we need to spend a few minutes talking about him.

Two Worlds Unite

Remember Jesus' words in John 18, "My kingdom is not of this world?" For many centuries from the time of Jesus until around the time of Constantine that was the case. Christianity stood outside of the social and political business of the world around them for some 300 years.

But that would begin to change.

We can begin to see in the time of Constantine and really culminating in Pope Gregory the uniting of the sacred and the secular. The church begins to have much more influence in the politics of the nations in which the church existed. That is maybe never more seen until an important event on Christmas Day in 799.

In the year of 800 the Pope, the bishop of Rome, was a man named Leo III. Apparently Leo and the previous Pope, a man named Adrian I didn't get along too well. Didn't get along like some of Adrian's men kidnapped Leo and tried to put his eyes out and cut off his tongue. That kind of didn't get along!

Pope Leo appealed to the ruler of the day, the King of the Franks named **Charles the Great** or as we would come to know him, **Charlemagne**. He was said to be seven feet tall and had a proportionately large body. He had long white hair and must have been quite a sight to look at.

Charlemagne comes to Leo's rescue and attends mass at St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas Day, 800. (slide of Charlemagne being crowned) At one point in the service, Charles came forward to pray at the front of the altar. As he was praying the Pope did the most amazing thing, he approached Charles the Great and placed the crown on his head as the congregation cried out: "To Charles, the most pious, crowned Augustus by God, to the great peace-making Emperor, long life and victory!" or so goes the story. The Pope then prostrated himself before the king. This moment would for the next thousand years marry the state and the church together. From this time forward there would be no more separation of church and state.

The state - Charlemagne, had the blessing of the Church and the Church had a protector for her lands and the ability to worship and carry on business.

"The Kingdom of God was now thought to have two arms: the spiritual, presided over by the pope, was to have responsibility for men's souls; the temporal was to have responsibility for the physical well-being of man. The pope and the emperor were to give each other mutual support." Earl Cairns

VII. Iconoclast Controversy

Another important event in this time period is known as the Iconoclast Controversy. Iconoclast = icons.

At issue was the use of icons in the worship service.

(slide of icons – Jesus – Mary with baby Jesus – the crucifixion scene)

Icons are simply pictures of Jesus, Mary, some of the saints and apostles that came to be very important to many in the Church, both in the West and the East, that is in Rome and in Constantinople.

The problem was that icons had been banned in the Byzantine Empire by Constantine V and that ban was supported by the Council of Hieria in 754.

For most people in the Church they didn't see the icons as idols. They saw them as ways to focus the believer in worship, giving someone a mental picture of whom they are worshipping. They also thought that the icons were helpful in telling the Biblical stories as many people were illiterate and books were scarce to begin with. At least that's how it started.

As with many good ideas or even good things, it didn't take too long before icons became something more than symbols. The icons themselves began to take on supernatural powers as people prayed to them, lit candles and burned incense before them.

All of this led to the **Second Council of Nicaea in 787** in the church of Hagia Sophia (see slide).

This was a meeting of the churches in the west and east to come to a conclusion about what to do with icons. Keep them or do away with them? The final decision? Keep 'em but don't worship them.

Here is the official decision from 787:

"As the sacred and life-giving cross is everywhere set up as a symbol, so also should the images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the holy angels, as well as those of the saints and other pious and holy men be embodied in the manufacture of sacred vessels, tapestries, vestments, etc., and exhibited on the walls of churches, in the homes, and in all conspicuous places, by the roadside and everywhere, to be revered by all who might see them. For the more they are contemplated, the more they move to fervent memory of their prototypes. Therefore, it is proper to accord to them a

fervent and reverent adoration, not, however, the veritable worship which, according to our faith, belongs to the Divine Being alone — for the honor accorded to the image passes over to its prototype, and whoever venerate the image venerate in it the reality of what is there represented."

So why don't we have icons all over the place? Well, if we lived anywhere prior to the Protestant Reformation we would. After the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's most Protestant Churches decided they weren't such a great idea after all, and we don't have them. They are not a part of our tradition.

But, if you walked into a Catholic Church today, or especially a Coptic (White Lane) or some branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, you would be overwhelmed by the amount of icons around the walls of the churches. Even in your homes. (slide of icons in home of Eastern Orthodox Christian)

(title slide)

So, here we are at A. D. 800. The church has grown over the last 750 from 11 disciples to a worldwide religion of millions. She has had her ups and downs.

Many have been faithful, even to the end of their own lives in fulfilling the missionary call to reach the unreached.

The wisest in the church have defended the church against heresy and have kept the main things the main things. The Trinity, the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the virgin birth, the truth of the cross and resurrection, etc.

Yet, the church has let some wrong teachings come in and those things have become institutionalized and accepted. Purgatory, praying to saints, the veneration of Mary, etc. and unfortunately we will see more and more in the days ahead. Things like the doctrine of infused righteousness and the sale of indulgences, etc.

Yet, the church is still there and growing and expanding. In some places it's not very health, in some other areas, there is still a remnant that remains faithful to the Scriptures.

Have we not seen though, how the church is often shaped by the culture in which she lives?

We see it today don't we? We, in the U.S., live in a time of religious freedom. Certainly not in a time of persecution as we've talked about it. Some might even say that it is tempting for some to say their Christian because it is the cultural thing to be. You get ahead in business or social circles by being a "church goer." That's proven to not always be good for the church.

Today we live in a consumer culture. I have a wide variety of choices and if I don't like something, I simply move on to something else.

We live in a culture of relativism. What's true for you isn't necessarily true for me. There are no moral absolutes. The church has bought into this.

We live in a culture that has redefined love. Love is affirming people whatever their choices are in life, even if they are unbiblical or harmful or both.

We live in an age of tolerance. That is, we are tolerant of everything except perceived intolerance. The church is buying into this thinking.

Q & A? (if time permits)

